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A DARKER SHADE OF ROSE

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BY BUZZ BISSINGER

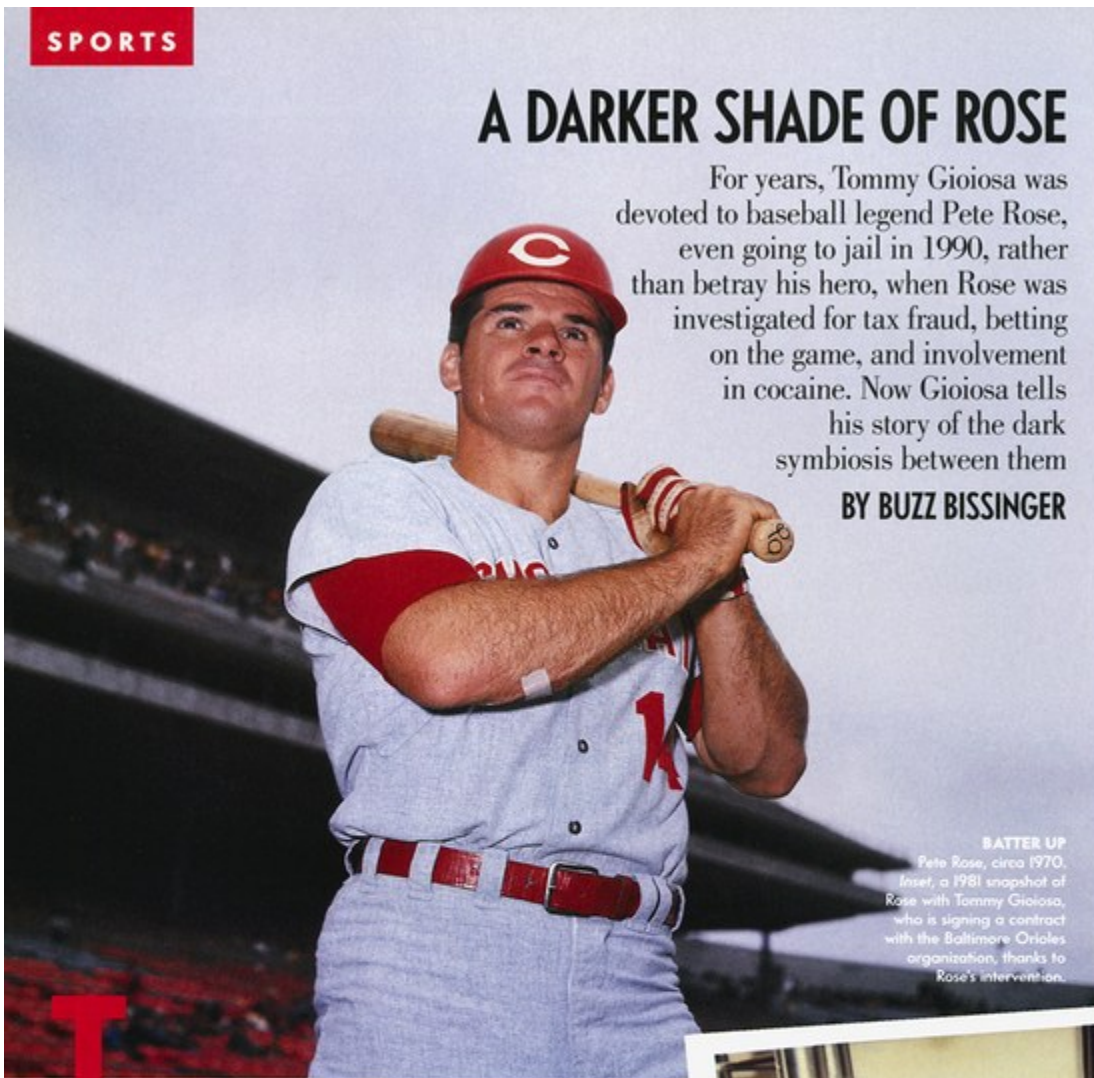
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SPORTS

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BATTER UP

Pete Rose, circa 1970. Inset, a 1981 snapshot of Rose with Tommy Gioiosa, who is signing a contract with the Baltimore Orioles organization, thanks to Rose's intervention.

The van carrying its cargo plodded along Interstate 75, and as the suburbs of Cincinnati washed by in the waning winter light, a 31-year-old man silently stared out the window. He wore a regulation orange jumpsuit with one set of chains around his waist and another around his ankles. He didn't know his final destination, but he did know, in a different time, he had been here before.

His name, Tommy Gioiosa, meant nothing to most people, and remnants of his vanished life passed by with virtually each mile of highway—the airport that had marked his arrival 11 years earlier with a beat-up suitcase that had been wrapped shut with silver duct tape, the Showcase Cinemas where he had gone to

the movies, the top of the clubhouse of the Turfway racetrack in Florence, Kentucky, where all those countless hours had been spent with the man he had loved like a father.

He asked the two guards in front where they were going, and they said he would know when they got there. He kept mostly to himself, a felon found guilty by a federal-court jury in Cincinnati five months earlier, in September 1989, of conspiracy to distribute cocaine and two charges relating to illegal declaration of income, so far removed from the white-toothed, impressionable, in-awe kid



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Top, from Globe Photos; Inset, courtesy of the collection of Tommy Gioiosa.

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He had it made.

That's what so many people back in his hometown of New Bedford thought, particularly the time he had come back in that white BMW with the red leather seats, not his BMW but something better, Pete Rose's BMW, Pete Rose! He had driven it nice and slow past the tired one-story storefronts of Acushnet Avenue, driving it slow enough so that everybody could see him like he was in a parade, his own victory parade. He went by Yor Dogg House, where

as a kid he had downed cheeseburgers and coffee milk, and then by Chuck's China Inn, with the chow mein sandwiches on a hamburger bun and its very own booths that in the North End of this Massachusetts town were a very big deal. He went by the pink door of the Volunteers of America, where his mother had told him to take whatever he liked from the used-clothing bin. He went by Costa's, and Sullivan Brothers, and Chenel's, and he made damned sure he went by Baylies Square Plate Glass so his cousin could check out his wheels.

He turned right on Covell Street, staying on it until he came to the brown two-decker house on the slope of a hill just up from the mills. His mother, Irene, had come outside, and when she saw the BMW she asked if she could just sit in the red leather seats, just hold the steering wheel and feel it, touch it, because it was Pete Rose's steering wheel. "I ain't gonna go anywhere," she promised.

He had it made. And that's what he thought, too, until it all got so crazy and out of control and he turned into something despicable, before he would realize that life with Rose had evolved into no life at all but only the thinnest shadow of one and that so much of his time had been spent as a "shit bum," as he would later call it, there to do what Rose wanted when he wanted regardless of the cost.

The van continued south on I-75, the suburbs dissolving into the rolling hills of Kentucky-bluegrass country, stark in winter and increasingly isolated. It went by Exit 144 for Corinth and Owenton, and Gioiosa still didn't know where he was going. It turned off the interstate at Exit 115, then wound its way to Man o' War Boulevard. To the right was the Keeneland Race Course. That too was a place Gioiosa (pronounced "Gee-oh-suh") had been to before, in the company of Pete Rose, when he had ridden in a Rolls-Royce instead of a white prison van and had gone by the green swell of Calumet Farm with the ribbon of its low white fences and the horses grazing and Rose giving him his own private tutoring session.

G-ski, rich motherfuckers. These people got fucking money.

It was impossible not to know that there was something about Rose that was utterly original, a "crazy bastard," as Gioiosa later put it, with affection. Rose's style spread in all directions, whether it was his love of the Gay 90s restaurant on Harrison Avenue with its applesauce, because Rose loved the goddamned applesauce, and its waitresses, who still had a couple of

teeth left and croaked at him, “Hey, Pete, you son of a bitch,” or his puzzlement over the relationship of spectators to pro golfers:

Why the fuck are they all so quiet? The ball don't move.

Keeneland had all the traditional vestiges of horse racing, lampposts painted green and stone entranceways and patrons in proper attire. Rose and Gioiosa had marched into its exclusive clubhouse in bell-bottom polyester pants made by a frantic tailor named Pepe, whose motto was “Bigger the shoe, bigger the bell.” As Rose had his styled with a high waist and no pockets in back, so did Gioiosa, even though he was 17 years younger.

The races at Keeneland then were not called over a public-address system, in keeping with the view that horse racing was still the sport of kings, to be seen and not heard. The patrons carried binoculars, dainty binoculars barely bigger than their hands, except for Rose, who carried a pair large enough for a safari hunt, and had bought an extra set for Gioiosa.

G-ski, you got your binocs?

The horses then left the starting gate, accompanied by nothing, except Rose's own voice. He spoke sideways, as if he were spitting and calling a country reel at the same time.

Hey, G-ski. What did the monkey say when they cut off his balls? … They're off!

Sometime later the memory of that would make Gioiosa laugh. But now he had feelings of shame and disgrace, as well as a feeling of abandonment, an awareness that the man he loved like a father, told a packed courtroom he loved like a father, almost as if he were getting on his hands and knees like a supplicant, didn't give a single shit about him.

The white van headed down a service road of the nearby Blue Grass Airport into a fenced-off area. Gioiosa waited in the van until an unmarked plane came—white with a blue stripe. As he and the others left the van, guards with shotguns surrounded them. He hobbled out because it was difficult to walk, and right before he got to a set of steps, a guard stepped on the chain between his ankles and searched him. And then he once again hobbled, up those steps into the plane that would take him to prison.

How did it all go so fucking bad? He had silently asked himself that question when he had seen the stone entranceway of Keeneland. But finding the answer to it would take years because of the complexity and soul-searching aspects of it, the things he knew that he had never spoken about. It was an incredible story—improbable at its very roots, raucous and crazy until it all inevitably crashed, a sporting version of *GoodFellas* with its underpinnings of womanizing and gambling and Porsches and cash stashed in stacks of 10 grand in a false ceiling.

Gioiosa says he has decided to tell his full story in part because the saga of Pete Rose will never go away. Not for Rose, who was banned from baseball in 1989 and then a year later was sentenced to five months in prison on two counts of filing false tax returns. Not for Gioiosa, who served close to three years in federal prison before he was freed in October 1992. Gioiosa was a major figure in the Rose case, and he has seen constant references to himself over the years that don't come anywhere close to revealing what he says happened and why he did what he did. The themes that resonate through his story are timeless and cautionary.

In 1988 and 1989, in the thick of investigations into Rose and others for a variety of activities ranging from drugs to income-tax evasion, agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service visited Gioiosa, seeking his cooperation. The Office of the Commissioner of Major League Baseball, during its investigation of whether Rose had bet on the game, hotly pursued Gioiosa as well. Given that he had shared a condominium with Rose from 1979 to roughly 1984 and had dealt with him regularly until the beginning of 1987, they surmised he knew things that might be of enormous significance. But alone among those who were snared in the investigation, Gioiosa refused to say anything to investigators, at clear detriment to himself because of the possibility for a plea bargain had he cooperated. Instead, he went to trial and was found guilty by a jury.

Gioiosa was recently interviewed for more than 100 hours by *Vanity Fair*. In those interviews, Gioiosa said that he, at Rose's instruction, copied the ballplayer's signature on thousands of items of memorabilia. He said he placed bets on baseball for Rose when Rose was the player-manager of the Cincinnati Reds. He said that he was with Rose when Rose expressed interest in investing money in cocaine because of its financial return, and that he and a known drug dealer subsequently went to Rose's house and picked up a significant sum of cash that was used for the purchase of cocaine in Florida. He also said he was in Rose's

office when Rose showed him a bat that, against the rules of Major League Baseball, had been tampered with—“corked,” in baseball vernacular—to help him maintain the “snap” in his bat.

Gioiosa’s account of his life with Rose has been supported by interviews, previously published material about Rose that includes hundreds of newspaper and magazine clippings and two books, and nearly 5,000 pages of documents both from federal court and from the seven-volume investigation of Rose by the Office of the Commissioner of Major League Baseball. In 1989 an agreement was reached in which Rose accepted a lifelong ban from baseball for gambling, with the proviso that he could apply for reinstatement.

Much of what Gioiosa describes happened between him and Rose alone. It represents his account, since Rose will not comment on it. “We have absolutely no interest,” said Rose’s longtime agent, Warren Greene. In one of several telephone conversations regarding an interview, Greene confirmed that Rose was present with him, and Rose could be heard in the background reiterating his refusal to be interviewed: “No interest last week, this week, or next week.” (Rose also did not respond to a list of detailed written questions submitted to him through both Greene and his attorney Roger Makley.)



Greene noted that Gioiosa is referring to events that occurred more than a decade ago and that what he says cannot be considered credible, because it represents a one-sided view of what may or may not have happened. “It’s not worth it to sit down and contradict a new version of someone’s story,” he said.

But Rose actually seems eager to discuss the past with certain media outlets. In July he appeared on the Fox cable sports documentary program *Beyond the Glory*. The segment, focusing largely on the events surrounding Rose’s ban from baseball, was extremely sympathetic to his case. During the show, he insisted that he had never bet on baseball and lashed out at one of his accusers, calling him a “lying scumbag drug offender.” Rose also

accused the baseball commissioner's office of having a vendetta against him. "They can't stand the fact that I'm still alive," he said. "They wish I was dead."

The relationship between Rose and Gioiosa reveals a tale quintessentially American in all its hues—about the tantalizing power of money and materialism, about hero worship and the false immunity it creates, about the price of loyalty. It is also threaded with beauty, for Gioiosa himself had been a skilled baseball player and realized that so much of the allure of Rose was a particular kind of American genius, his genius, a genius that Rose protected and nurtured no matter what else happened.

Gioiosa saw it at the ballpark, as did millions of baseball fans, but he saw it most intimately at a batting cage in Cincinnati called the Ball Game, where Rose would spend hours at a time, often with whatever girlfriend he had in tow at the moment, telling Gioiosa to go to the machine and "load 'em up." At certain times, Rose would hold the bat as if it were a pool cue, aiming it with the barrel end forward. Then, with one hand gripping the handle and the ball coming in at 75 or 80 miles an hour, he would lay it right off the rounded tip of the barrel end with the sound of a plink. If Rose had missed, he could have cracked a wrist. Gioiosa, who had hit over .300 in college, did try and did miss. But Pete Rose never missed, the sound of that plink like perfect notes.

The first picture of the two of them, taken the very first time they met, at King Arthur's Inn in Tampa, Florida, is slightly blurred. On the left, in a bathing suit, is Gioiosa with a dazed half-smile on his face. On the right, in polyester pants that may be pink, or light brown at best, is Pete Rose. His Doberman puppy, named Dobie, is between them.

Gioiosa was 19, and he had managed to climb a rung out of New Bedford, playing second base for a community college near Boston called Massasoit. Rose, at 35, was at the apex of an iconic career. The year before, in 1976, the Big Red Machine of the Cincinnati Reds had swept the Yankees in the World Series. Rose had hit .323 for the season, leading the National League in runs, hits, and doubles. He was on his way to becoming *The Sporting News's* player of the decade for the 1970s.

It would have been better if the picture had stopped right there, put away in a scrapbook or a top desk drawer. But even then Gioiosa looked hooked, hopelessly hooked, as if in some odd way Rose embodied a lifeline.

Gioiosa didn't want simply to get out of New Bedford. He was terrified by the thought of dead-ending there, staring into nothing the way the guys over at the Panthers club on Madeira stared past their bottles of beer into nothing, doomed to the rote of assembly work in one of those block-long mills along the Acushnet River, or to one of those boats where you spent day after day sick as a bastard, slicked and stinking of fish.

The house on Covell Street that Gioiosa grew up in was narrow, with a kitchen so tiny that it couldn't even hold a refrigerator. "Let's face it. We were poor," says his mother, Irene.

Gioiosa lived through sports, football played with a bunch of socks because no one could afford a real football, endless games of baseball with torn-up balls that had so much black electrical tape around them he and his friends called them "black baseballs."

Sports became his badge and his escape in a family that struggled. His father was a glazier and worked hard to put food on the table, and drove his son to the Y.M.C.A. every night. But he also disciplined hard, with one of those strops that barbers used to sharpen a razor, and sometimes, after some beers over at the Panthers club, he would come to his son's games and embarrass him so much with his screams at opposing players that Gioiosa just wanted to disappear.

By the time Gioiosa was in high school at New Bedford High in the mid-1970s, he was a baseball star, a two-year captain who played second base and led the state in hitting his senior year. He had never grown very tall, five feet seven, if that. So he compensated with balls-to-the-wall hustle and aggressiveness, a style of play that was dirt-drenched and reminded people of someone. "You looked at Tom and you thought of Pete Rose," says Treg Monty, who was the team's catcher in 1976. "It was just a really freaky thing."

Serendipity brought them together. Massasoit started its baseball season in March 1977 with a trip to Florida and had picked King Arthur's Inn for its lodgings. As it turned out, Rose had been staying there for years with his family in Rooms 132 and 133, since the facilities the Reds used for spring training were nearby.

While most of the other players on the Massasoit team went out drinking when they weren't practicing or playing, Gioiosa hung by the pool. He befriended a kid named Petey, who he later found out was Pete Rose's son. Then he saw Rose himself and had the picture of the two of them taken together. The relationship Gioiosa had with Petey endeared him both to Rose and to Rose's wife at the time, Karolyn. Almost 25 years later, Karolyn Rose distinctly remembers him for his brimming enthusiasm. "I liked Tommy because he reminded me of a young kid that wanted to make something of himself," she says.

Gioiosa watched everything Rose did. He figured out that the Porsche parked out in front of King Arthur's Inn under a metal awning was Rose's, and he got up early one day just to look at it. He touched the handles and peered in one of the windows, trying to figure out what music Rose listened to so he could listen to it also.

They all met again at King Arthur's Inn in 1978 under similar circumstances, with Gioiosa still playing for Massasoit and Rose with the Reds. Gioiosa went over and shook Rose's hand, and Rose told him to stop shaking his hand. He remembered his name, and Gioiosa couldn't believe that he remembered. Rose whacked him on the shoulder and asked him how his baseball was going, and Gioiosa told him that he had batted over .300 for Massasoit the season before and was hoping to play in the vaunted Cape Cod league that summer.

"You just play hard," Rose said.

"I'm gonna play more than hard," said Gioiosa.

He figured that was the end of it.

Gioiosa bought a ticket with a Saturday layover in Cincinnati so he could get the best deal. The suitcase he used, one of those alligator-print jobs, was hauled down from the attic. It smelled and it was old. Gioiosa threw in a couple of pairs of jeans. He wore a pair of Converse sneakers with a rip in one of the toes.

The invitation was unbelievable to him, and he wasn't the only one. Irene Gioiosa didn't believe it at first, because it didn't make any sense that Pete Rose would say it was O.K. for him to visit. So Karolyn Rose got on the phone and said that he was welcome, that little Petey wanted to have Gioiosa come out. Gioiosa was 20 at the time, back in New Bedford

working with his dad at Baylies Square Plate Glass on Acushnet. He wasn't playing baseball, and his life was going in the exact direction he had dreaded.

He arrived at the house, in an upscale subdivision of Western Hills in Cincinnati, sometime around the beginning of 1979. He couldn't believe the size of the lawns compared with what he was used to in New Bedford, chain-link fences surrounding little squares of grass barely big enough for the dog to piss on. At a certain point, he ripped out a little piece of Rose's lawn and put it into his suitcase so he could remember what that lawn had been like after he went back home.

The house had five bedrooms and four baths. His room upstairs had a television and a huge bed and a closet and its own bathroom and shower. He had never stayed in a bedroom with its own bathroom, much less its own shower. He had no idea that there was more than one shower in the house, so the first few times he used it, he wiped it down in case someone else needed it.

He just sat on the bed and waited until little Petey yelled for him. He went down and sat in a chair in the family room. He noticed the picture hanging over the fireplace—the adult head of Pete Rose on a naked baby's body. He was so nervous that when the family dog came over he didn't dare touch him and just let him sniff.

Karolyn Rose treated him like a member of the family. They went to White Castle, because Pete Rose loved his White Castles. Later on they all piled into the Rolls-Royce and went to Kmart because Karolyn Rose loved Kmart.

At the end of his visit, Gioiosa told Rose that staying with him had been a dream. Rose asked him where he was going. Gioiosa told him he was going home. Rose asked him if he would like to stay—maybe meet him down in spring training for the new team he was playing with in 1979, the Philadelphia Phillies. Gioiosa didn't know what to say.

“I don't have any clothes.”

“I didn't ask you if you got any clothes. I got clothes for you. Do you want to stay?”

Rose took Gioiosa back into his bedroom. He handed him a pair of Nike sneakers. He handed him silk shirts that had been dry-cleaned, and Gioiosa had never worn shirts that had been dry-cleaned, and as with the little piece of lawn, he kept one of the little dry-cleaning tags just so he would never forget it. The shirts were a little big, too, the sleeves going down to his hands. But he didn't care, because he was wearing a silk shirt, Pete Rose's silk shirt.

More than 20 years later, Gioiosa puzzles over that invitation. "To this day I wondered," he says. It may have had to do with the fact that Gioiosa was like an older brother to little Petey, or perhaps Gioiosa reminded Rose of what he himself had been like when he was young and hungry, when he had been a river rat from the banks of the Ohio in a ramshackle section of Cincinnati's West Side that was threaded by a railroad line and looked more than just a little bit like where Gioiosa had grown up in New Bedford, in the shadow of the mills.

But there was also a more practical reason, the establishment of a relationship in which Gioiosa would do whatever Rose asked, one that would only intensify over the next eight years until they parted company in 1987.

When they were coming home from the racetrack one night during his initial visit, Gioiosa says, Rose asked him to fetch the newspaper as soon as it was delivered and get rid of it. When the paper arrived around 5:30 a.m., Gioiosa crept outside and dumped it into the bushes. Then he went back to bed. When he came down later, he says, Karolyn Rose was arguing with her husband. She pointed out that Gioiosa had not done a very good job of discarding the newspaper, since the covering of snow on the ground had made his tracks easy to follow. The paper contained a story about how Pete Rose had been named in a paternity suit by a woman named Terri Rubio. Gioiosa remembers Rose telling Karolyn, "Don't believe that shit," but in the end Rose settled the suit.

Virtually from the moment that Gioiosa arrived in Cincinnati, he remembers, Rose made no attempt to hide from him the fact that he had girlfriends. He called it "juggling," and Gioiosa became a facilitator, picking up girlfriends from the airport, sending money to at least one of them via Western Union, taking the vaunted Hickok belt that Rose had won as the nation's best athlete to Litwin jewelers and having all the diamonds removed and made into earrings that Rose would parcel out as gifts. (Rose then had fake diamonds inserted and sold the belt

for about \$30,000 to a collector, who exacted his own measure of revenge when the securities he gave Rose as payment turned out to be worthless.)

In 1979, after Rose separated from his wife, he and Gioiosa started to live together in a detached condominium in a complex called Chateau Lakes. Rose's second-floor bedroom had a perfect view of the access road through a thicket of trees. He sometimes watched from the window, and when the car of his steady girlfriend came into view, Gioiosa says, Rose would begin to yell like a sentry on guard duty.



Here she comes!

He would give a childlike squeal resembling “Gh! Gh! Gh!” Then the girl in Rose's bedroom at that particular moment would be dispatched out of the condo and into her car.

The condominium Rose and Gioiosa shared in Chateau Lakes was small and nondescript. Playing with the Philadelphia Phillies then, Rose spent almost all of the baseball season away from Cincinnati. But during the off-season he went back to Cincinnati and the condo. It had an entrance that opened into the living room, an alcove for eating, and a small kitchen. It had a burgundy carpet just a gradation or two from being purple, and it was haphazardly decorated—a gray couch, a television, a World Series trophy Rose had won with the Reds collecting dust on a shabby table.

In the basement, there was a light fixture built into a ceiling of removable panels. It was behind those panels at one point, Gioiosa says, that Rose hid stacks of cash in \$10,000 bundles. The money, perhaps as much as \$100,000, came from a trip that Rose made to Japan, according to Gioiosa. Rose had it inside a bag when he arrived at the airport in Cincinnati. He gave it to Gioiosa to carry as they were walking toward the exit, and he told him to unzip it and take a look inside. Gioiosa saw piles of cash when he did.

Gioiosa also remembers an occasion in which Rose had him fly to San Francisco to meet a representative of the Japanese sporting-goods company Mizuno, which had an endorsement deal with Rose. The representative handed Gioiosa a bag, and when he took it back to Rose he discovered that it contained at least \$50,000 of “stew,” Rose’s term for money.

Gioiosa says the money in the ceiling was there for Rose to “pick at” when he needed it for gambling. Rose lost track of how much was there, says Gioiosa. On one occasion, when Gioiosa was changing the bulb in the basement fixture, he says, he found an errant \$10,000. He showed it to Rose, and Rose was gratified.

“I thought I lost that.”

By the early 1980s, Rose and Gioiosa had become so intertwined that rumors ran rampant all over Cincinnati that Gioiosa was in fact Rose’s illegitimate son, which he wasn’t. There wasn’t any real physical resemblance. Gioiosa was dark and had strong features, evidence of his Italian-Portuguese roots. Rose, who grew up in a neighborhood of Poles, Germans, and Irish, was midwestern to the bone. But something almost eerie was taking shape—the way Gioiosa wore his hair like Rose and sounded like Rose and played like Rose when, through Rose’s intervention, he got a baseball scholarship to the University of Cincinnati in 1980. On the field, Gioiosa wore No. 14 on his uniform, like Rose.

In Rose, Gioiosa found not only a lifestyle he had never dreamed of but also a father figure. Rose gave Gioiosa clothing. He gave him a car and cash and let him live for free. He was generous in a way Gioiosa could not fathom and would never forget. In Gioiosa, Rose found a rapt audience for everything he did. Gioiosa fulfilled the role of willing participant, whether it meant lying in bed and being on the receiving end of Rose’s stealth fart attacks. Or staying up with Rose until the wee hours to watch some car-racing wreck on ESPN that Rose had already watched once before. Or going to a pharmacy with a prescription for amphetamines that Rose wanted filled. Or helping him out of bed one day after his back went out in the midst of chasing Ty Cobb’s record for hits and hearing him mutter, at the thought that the injury was serious and might impede his march on Cobb, “Rest in peace, Ty Cobb, you motherfucker.”

But at a certain point Gioiosa wondered where it was all going. After the college baseball season had ended, he had a duffel bag packed and was ready to return to New Bedford, aware of what his life with Pete Rose had evolved into: “Do this. Do that. Do this. Do that.” And I did it.”

He had applied for a position with the Massachusetts State Police. But Rose told him to wait a few days before making a decision. He waited, and he never went home.

In August 1981, Rose and Gioiosa drove together to the all-star game in Cleveland in a Rolls-Royce. Two sisters came along as traveling companions and so did little Petey. Then Rose and Gioiosa and little Petey drove all night to Philadelphia because Rose had a regular-season game the next night against the St. Louis Cardinals. They got in early in the morning. On their way to the condo where Rose stayed, in the Jersey suburbs, they passed Veterans Stadium, home of the Phillies. Rose made that squealing sound he made when he was excited and said, “That place is gonna be packed tonight.”

Rose came up to bat in the bottom of the eighth after going zero for three. Thousands of flashbulbs went off all over the stadium like a laser show, or incoming tracer fire, and Gioiosa didn’t know how even Pete Rose could possibly concentrate with all those lights exploding into the night. But then the stadium erupted as the ball came off the bat between third and short, and inside the dugout a coach started yelling over and over, “He done it! He done it! He done it!” And Rose had done it, had broken Stan Musial’s National League record for hits with 3,631. And there, right there in the dugout, was Tommy Gioiosa from Covell Street in New Bedford.

Rose got Gioiosa a tryout with the Baltimore Orioles organization sometime in the summer of 1981. They signed him to a contract, and it was a dream come true for Gioiosa, a payoff for all those hours back in New Bedford at Brooklawn Park fielding ground balls and taking batting practice into the night from his buddy Woody. He was desperate for his parents to be proud of him. In a letter, he gave them careful instructions on how they should save a copy of the contract, and he promised to buy Mercedes 450s for his brother, Joe, and his sister, Lisa, once he made it to the Show and became as famous as Pete Rose.

Gioiosa went to the Orioles camp in 1982. He played with his usual guts. He could turn the pivot defensively at second and had batted over .300 at the University of Cincinnati. But he

was 24 years old, ancient for a prospect in whom the Orioles had nothing invested, and he was released.

He had no idea what to do after that. He felt more indebted to Pete Rose than ever, because it had been Rose who had gotten him the Orioles tryout, but he also knew there was no way he could ever materially repay him. He felt embarrassed, convinced he had let Rose down. He also knew his dream of playing major-league baseball was over, the dream that had defined him as much as anything had. The psychological mix of it all was toxic, and he reacted by returning to the condo in Cincinnati to resume his life with Pete Rose.

In addition to the responsibilities he had with Rose, to wash the Porsche and the Rolls and make sure they ran right, and go to the bank to cash a check, he was given other ones over the years.

Rose had always been popular on the memorabilia market, and he became even hotter after he broke the National League record for hits. That meant autographs, which were a chore to do, particularly when there were a lot of them, so Rose, Gioiosa says, early on taught him how to duplicate his signature. Gioiosa diligently practiced, and Rose critiqued him on how not to drag the *e* and how to come up with the *t*, playfully slapping him in the head when Gioiosa did it wrong.

As the decade progressed from that moment in 1981 when Rose broke Musial's record, both he and Gioiosa went through periods of change. Rose began to struggle at the plate, the genius of his swing increasingly lost to the depredations of age. In 1982 he hit only .271 for the Phillies. The next year he hit .245, and he was let go, the talk rife that he had lost his bat speed. He spent most of the next year in the misery of Montreal, struggling with a .259 average and only eight extra-base hits in 278 at-bats, until at the tail end when he went back to the Reds as the player-manager. It was the triumphant return of the native son, for in Cincinnati Rose might as well have been the president of the United States.

It was also during this period that Rose's gambling dramatically increased, to the point where by 1985 it had become, by many accounts, pathological. To the extent that Rose has ever specifically talked about his gambling, he has never admitted to betting on baseball, despite overwhelming evidence. In a deposition he gave to attorney John Dowd, who headed up the investigation for the baseball commissioner's office, he did admit to gambling on

football and basketball, and said that all the betting he had done was through Gioiosa as his middleman.

According to Gioiosa, the first action he placed on behalf of Rose was with a bookie who was a Cincinnati fireman, the next with someone who lived in Kentucky. The bets were relatively modest, says Gioiosa, and exclusively on football and basketball. But in 1985 Gioiosa was instructed to find Rose another bookie, one who could handle bets in which \$2,000 a game was considered routine. Gioiosa came up with someone named Ron Peters. At first, as before, the bets Gioiosa placed with Peters were on basketball and football. But at a certain point, Gioiosa says, Rose began to bet on baseball, on several occasions doing it directly with Peters from his phone in the clubhouse office as Gioiosa listened. He says that Rose bet on the Reds, and that he was present for an incident in which Rose called a major-league manager, ostensibly to chat but in truth to check on the status of whoever was pitching that night. “Who’s pitching? How’s he feeling?” Like he really cared,” says Gioiosa. “Of course it was for betting.”

It was also during this period that Rose became obsessed with breaking Ty Cobb’s record for most hits. He had gotten his 4,000th in Montreal, and he needed only 192 more. But it was also clear to virtually everyone in baseball that as a hitter he was living on vapors, unable to hit with any of his former authority.

Gioiosa is not sure of the exact date when he saw it, but he is certain of what Rose showed him in his clubhouse office after he had become the player-manager of the Reds: a bat that Rose told him was “corked,” pointing to a little hole.



“Check it out. Cork,” Gioiosa says Rose told him. Under the rules of Major League Baseball, bats cannot be internally tampered with in any way. Despite the rule, in an effort to give the ball added jump when contact is made, players have for years resorted to secretly inserting cork into bats by drilling a hole and then resealing it. When Gioiosa asked Rose what would happen if it broke, the response was “There’d be fucking cork all over the place.” Then he

told Gioiosa that it wouldn't break because he would lay off the kind of pitches that cause a bat to break. Gioiosa also says that Rose, as a precaution against detection by umpires, would hit the bat on the concrete floor so it would look scuffed.

As Rose became addicted to gambling, Gioiosa developed an addiction of his own. Upon his return to Cincinnati, Gioiosa resumed the job he had had before he left, as a bouncer and bartender at a raucous bar on Second Street called Sleep Out Louie's. The shame of not making it with the Orioles continued to eat away at him. He blamed his failure on his size, and he thought that if he got bigger and stronger it would not only get him back into baseball but also impress Rose, make him "proud of me," as he later put it at his trial.

Several of Gioiosa's co-workers at Sleep Out Louie's were massive and muscular. When he asked them how they had gotten that way, they talked about taking anabolic steroids.

Sometime around 1984, Gioiosa received his first steroid injection in his buttocks, shoving a towel between his teeth because he was afraid it would hurt. From that moment on, Gioiosa took anabolic steroids almost nonstop for three years. His regimen included Equipoise, a drug intended for horses. He got injections three times a week in each cheek of the buttocks for a total of six per week, often traveling with a little kit so he could shoot himself up.

His weight went from roughly 165 pounds up to 204, and whereas he could once bench-press 135 pounds, he became able to bench-press 405. But his physical changes, which in the eyes of many friends made him look virtually gorilla-like, were nothing compared with the psychological ones that were later testified to at his trial by doctors who examined him and also by friends and family members—arrogance, grandiosity, a lack of fear about the consequences of his actions, a willingness to fight at almost any moment.

Fueled by the steroids, Gioiosa was also fueled by his continued link to Pete Rose. They were no longer living together in the condominium, since Rose had remarried in 1984 and purchased a palatial home on several acres in the exclusive Cincinnati suburb of Indian Hill. But Gioiosa continued to place tens of thousands of dollars of bets for him on a weekly basis, and went to the Reds' clubhouse to see him, and exchanged Christmas gifts with him one year when he gave Rose a little music box in the shape of a hobo that Rose put in the family room. Gioiosa tried to show off by proving what a good " juggler " he had become, arriving at

the track with one woman, then leaving and returning with another, so he could hear Rose laugh and say, “Jesus Christ, unbelievable.” He continued to do what he could for Rose, but, in the increasing desperation of what Gioiosa describes as a “collision of their addictions,” their relationship was becoming darker and ever more frantic.

Rose’s need for cash to pay off his gambling debts, and his attempts to hide this from his legal and financial advisers, became almost constant, according to numerous accounts. Gioiosa’s thirst for steroids was such that he developed what he calls a “reverse anorexia,” in which all he wanted to do was get bigger and bigger, regardless of the personal and psychological costs.

He was living a life of outrageous flamboyance that he could not possibly sustain—flying the Porsche at 125 miles an hour down the interstate, getting out of tickets by giving the cops who stopped him the autographed pictures of Rose that he always had handy in the glove compartment, wrapping his money in a rubber band just the way Rose did.

When Dave Clark, a former teammate from junior college, and his wife, Kathy, went to visit Gioiosa in the mid-1980s, they saw firsthand his lifestyle—the cars and the cash and Gioiosa’s placing bets for Rose with no attempt to hide it. Clark even felt a little jealous. But his wife knew that the end result would be self-destruction. “This shit’s gonna go,” she said to herself.

And as far as that link to Rose went, it was always precarious. As a man named Paul Janszen, who also placed bets with bookmakers for Rose, puts it, “For [Gioiosa] to keep Pete Rose, he has to prove his worth. What does he have to offer? You have to be able to offer him something.”

Sometime in 1984 or the beginning of 1985, Gioiosa became the manager of the Gold’s Gym in the Cincinnati suburb of Forest Park. He got paid \$500 a week, and he became friendly with the two men who were heavily involved in running the club, Donald Stenger and Michael Fry. Rose met both individuals through Gioiosa and ended up borrowing money from Fry and selling Stenger a BMW he owned. As it later turned out, both Stenger and Fry were also in the business of dealing cocaine, and both were sent to prison for it. Stenger pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute cocaine as well as tax evasion

and was sentenced to 10 years. Fry pleaded guilty to possession with intent to distribute cocaine and filing a false income-tax return and was sentenced to eight years.

Gioiosa was aware of what they were doing. When Stenger asked him to drive to Florida with cash and pick up cocaine, he said yes. He says he also made another trip, which came about after a conversation with Rose.

The conversation, Gioiosa says, took place with Stenger present. According to Gioiosa, Rose expressed interest in investing in cocaine. According to Gioiosa, Rose then said he wanted Gioiosa to be the one to drive down to Florida because he trusted him. Gioiosa says that he expressed concern about getting stopped, particularly if he was carrying a significant amount of cash belonging to Rose, and that Rose challenged him by asking if he was “fucking scared.”

Sometime after that, Gioiosa says, he and Stenger went to Rose’s house in Indian Hill and were met by a housekeeper, who was aware they were coming. She went upstairs, says Gioiosa, and then came back down with a large quantity of cash. Gioiosa says that Stenger took the money. Roughly a week after that, Gioiosa says, he picked up a bag containing cash from Stenger and made the trip to Florida.

“I don’t know that to have happened,” says Stenger in response to Gioiosa’s allegation.

This is not the only time that Rose was said to be eager to invest in cocaine. In February 1989, during the investigation of Rose by Major League Baseball, Paul Janszen said in an interview with investigators for baseball that Rose had discussed cocaine with him sometime around the beginning of 1987. According to the interview, Rose said he had a certificate of deposit maturing and was considering the possibility, as Janszen paraphrased it in the interview, to “use that money and buy the kilos and I’ll keep them in my house because nobody would have the balls to come in my house.”

Janszen went on to say that Rose, eager to generate as much cash as possible, noted that \$50,000 could be the equivalent of \$150,000 if it wasn’t subject to income tax. Janszen then said in the interview that Rose had speculated on how much he could make from a kilo of cocaine and whether he could make “\$30,000 on a kilo.”

Roger Makley, the attorney who represented Rose during the course of the criminal investigation into his activities and continues to represent him in his efforts to be reinstated into baseball, says that a variety of federal agencies had probed deeply into allegations that Rose was involved in cocaine and never found anything. “[Rose] never had any involvement in cocaine,” says Makley. “That’s the fact of the matter.”

Gioiosa knew that the responsibility for making the trip was his. He was also aware that he could get into trouble for doing it. But he says that he was “scared” to say no to Pete Rose about anything. From almost their very first night in Cincinnati together, when Gioiosa had offered to wash the snow and grime off Rose’s Porsche, so much of their relationship revolved around his doing what Rose wanted. And Gioiosa also felt an abiding indebtedness to Rose for initially taking him into his life and helping him sign a professional-baseball contract. “I would never say no,” he says. “I guess out of loyalty. I don’t know any other word to use but loyalty.”

It sounds like a simplistic explanation. But friends of Gioiosa’s knew his devotion had reached a point that seemed almost desperate. “If Pete had said to Tommy, ‘Put your head on this block so I can chop it,’ the poor guy probably would have done it,” says Dave Clark.

By the beginning of 1987, Rose had gotten tired of Gioiosa’s behavior. There was an incident at the Turfway racetrack in which Gioiosa and two Cincinnati police officers created a ruckus in Rose’s private box with their yelling and screaming. There was one in which Gioiosa became so infuriated with another driver that he put his fist through the driver’s car window while stopped at a light. As his friend Bill Kohler puts it, “He was fucking out of control.”

Rose apparently began to feel that Gioiosa was becoming too vocal about his betting activities. He also apparently indicated to a friend that Gioiosa was going out of his mind because of his steroid use, although Gioiosa says it was never something that Rose discussed with him directly. Ben Stroup, who worked with Gioiosa at Sleep Out Louie’s as a bouncer, says Rose’s reaction was to laugh when he heard about all the fights.

But a more fundamental reason for Gioiosa’s being phased out may well have been that Rose had found someone else who would place his bets and do little chores around the house.

That was Paul Janszen, and as he watched the interplay between Rose and Gioiosa, he could intuit what was happening. “Pete had no use for him. And why not? He had me.”

On January 16, 1987—almost 10 years after they had first met outside King Arthur’s Inn and Gioiosa had vowed to Rose that he would give 180 percent to his dream of playing major-league baseball and Rose had told him that all he needed to give was 110 percent—Rose and Gioiosa came together for what was their last social occasion. Gioiosa, 28 years old, ballooned and misshapen, looked like a blowfish, living not a life but only the “illusion” of one, as his wife put it later. Rose, 45 years old and no longer playing the game that in the history of the game no one had ever played the way he had, was so deep into sports gambling that he was betting as much as \$50,000 a week. In the preceding three years he had reportedly lost at least \$150,000 to one bookmaker alone.

They were at the Turfway racetrack with several others, and were in the process of trying to win a bet known as the Pik Six, in which the bettor picks the winners of six consecutive races. Rose held a sizable ticket, and an agreement was made among those who were there to divvy it up, with Rose getting the biggest share. Gioiosa arrived late, and Janszen could sense the undercurrent of tension between the two of them, just as Gioiosa could sense that he was being replaced. Rose didn’t want to cut Gioiosa in on the ticket at all, so Janszen agreed to sell him a portion of his share.

The ticket hit for \$47,646. Then Rose turned to Gioiosa and designated him to go cash it. “You need to show some income,” he said to Gioiosa, who also heard him grumble, “I pay enough to the fucking I.R.S.”

As he had done so often in the past, Gioiosa did as he was told. He went to the window and he filled out the necessary I.R.S. forms, since gambling winnings over a certain amount are taxed immediately and reported. Then he returned with the money and gave it to Rose, who parceled it out. A little more than two years later, a federal grand jury would end up indicting Gioiosa, and two of the counts against him, filing a false tax return and conspiracy to defraud the I.R.S., would stem from cashing that Turfway ticket for Pete Rose.

Next door to the Westin hotel in downtown Cincinnati is a store that sells Cincinnati Reds memorabilia. There are hundreds of items for sale—balls and bats and posters and videos—but the item that draws Gioiosa’s attention the most

has to do with Pete Rose. It is a laminated copy of the front page of *The Cincinnati Enquirer* of September 12, 1985, the day after Rose broke Ty Cobb's record for hits when he stroked the 4,192nd of his career.

numbers don't tell full story, says one headline, and Gioiosa, with the benefit of 16 years of perspective, is able to chuckle at the irony of that. Looking through the window at the copy of the *Enquirer* sets off pinpricks of memory for Gioiosa—the craziness of it all, the sadness, the shame over his own behavior.

In the summer of 1987, Gioiosa left Cincinnati and moved to San Diego to work at a health club. He returned to New Bedford about a year later, and when Leo Rolfes of the I.R.S. and Jayme Gentile of the F.B.I. came to New Bedford in the summer of 1988 and asked him what he knew about Pete Rose, he told them that he was a “great baseball player” and refused to cooperate. As time passed, he thought he was free and clear.

But on April 6, 1989, Gioiosa was arrested as he was walking down the steps of the house on Covell Street on the way to the gym. Two cars pulled up. He was handcuffed in front of the house. His mother began to sob. He told her everything would be O.K., and then he was taken away.

He went on trial that summer, and for much of two weeks he listened to what was said about him—his lavish lifestyle of fancy cars and exotic birds and gold jewelry and wads of cash kept in a sock although his income as a gym manager was only \$500 a week, his two trips to Florida to bring back cocaine, as well as several other supposed deals, his fighting and hideous behavior during his steroid use.

Gioiosa took the stand and, instead of denying what he had been charged with, admitted that much of it was true. He said his income had been supplemented with a 10 percent cut of Rose's gambling losses from bookmaker Ron Peters—the so-called vigorish that is standard in betting—although he was adamant, and is adamant to this day, that he had never been a drug dealer and had never received any money for anything involving drugs.

William Hunt, one of the prosecutors who tried Gioiosa, said in a recent interview that Gioiosa's participation in the cocaine-distribution ring that was uncovered during the course of the federal investigation basically amounted to his having been a “driver.” He also said

that Gioiosa in all probability could have pleaded guilty to a reduced charge had he cooperated at the right time.

His defense for his actions was his massive steroid use between 1984 and 1987, and there was striking medical testimony from several psychiatrists who had examined Gioiosa and reviewed his medical history; one described the symptoms he was suffering from—diminished concentration, increased aggressiveness, a loss in judgment.

But what may have been most wrenching about Gioiosa's testimony was what he said about Pete Rose—the way he said, “I wanted Pete to be proud of me because I thought I let him down in baseball,” the way he apologized to him for his behavior, the way he said it “would be an honor to be his son.”

It was almost as if Gioiosa had been talking not simply about Rose but *to* Rose —begging him to come in as a character witness and tell the jury that the monster Tom Gioiosa had become was not the man he really was, to explain the circumstances behind some of the charges against Gioiosa, or, at the very least, to privately acknowledge Gioiosa's silence during the investigation. But it didn't happen.

On September 12, 1989, a jury found Gioiosa guilty on three of the five counts against him. Several months later, on February 1, 1990, Gioiosa was sentenced to five years in prison. He spent roughly two weeks in a county jail and then was taken in the white prison van that traveled past the Keeneland Race Course to the Blue Grass Airport. He got out of prison in 1992 with virtually no money in his pockets, and ended up in Maitland, Florida, where, soon after, he met a woman named Sandy Weathers while working out at a gym.

Gioiosa and Weathers have been married a little over two years. They are in business together as distributors for Herbalife, the Los Angeles–based company that makes a host of weight-management, nutritional, and personal-care products. They have carved out a comfortable lifestyle for themselves.

When Gioiosa was incarcerated, he began to experience terrible pains, the result of his steroid use and a condition called gynecomastia. He underwent surgery while in prison to remove 290 grams of excess tissue that had built up in his breasts, a yellowish-pink mass

with the consistency of raw chicken. He lost 30 pounds after he got out of prison, almost as if he were shedding the skin of his former life.

He is 43 years old now, more than double the age he was when he first met Pete Rose. He hasn't seen Rose in 12 years, except on television, and the person he sees is different now—obviously older but also puffy and tired. Rose turned 60 this past April, and he makes his living in a variety of ways—the sale of his memorabilia, a six-figure multiyear contract as a spokesman for the automobile-paint-and-body-shop chain Maaco Enterprises, a licensing of his name to two restaurants in South Florida. He is still married to his second wife. They have two children, one of whom is an actress, and they have a home in the Los Angeles area. But much of the time Rose is on the road—acting as the grand marshal at the Kentucky Speedway, signing autographs at a helicopter exposition, as well as appearing at a World Wrestling Federation event in which a wrestler called Rikishi Phatu did his signature “butt-face” move into Rose’s face the night after Rose’s mother had died. Rose applied for reinstatement into baseball four years ago, but his bid has languished.

Gioiosa wasn't actually at Riverfront Stadium when Rose broke Cobb's record for hits that September night. But he was in Rose's office before the game, and as he continues to gaze at *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, it brings back memories of what that had been like. He was watching Rose get dressed, and there was something he always found beautiful about it because of Rose's obsession with perfection and detail, the embodiment of everything he was as a baseball player—the polished shoes, the shirt and socks just so, the bat wiped down with rubbing alcohol so that when he was at the plate and fouled one off he could see exactly where on the bat he had hit it.

But on this particular night, with its history-making implications, there was a departure. Gioiosa watched as Rose put on several undershirts instead of just one. It may have been puzzling at first. But Rose's explanation said it all.

“I'll sell every one of these motherfuckers.”

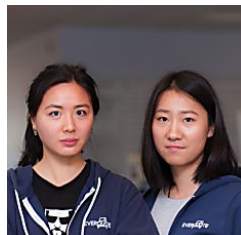
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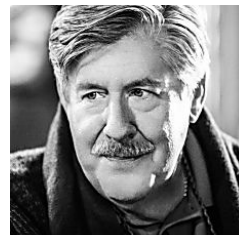
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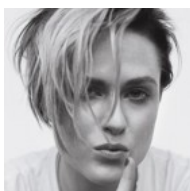
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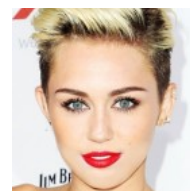
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